

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3012

October 5, 2017

Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Pai,

I write to express my sincere concern about the FCC's ability to communicate infrastructure status and situational awareness information, post crisis. I ask the Commission to provide a timeline on when it will begin to conduct field hearings in Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands.

The Disaster Information Reporting System (DIRS), a web-based system that communications companies can use to share network status information with the Commission quickly and efficiently, was deployed in all counties and municipalities in Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands. As a result of DIRS, the Commission was able to make daily updates to the public on the percentage of cell site outages. Also, through DIRS, the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau learned the status of each Public Safety Answering Point through 911 Service Providers filings. This reporting system helped to instill a sense of trust and visibility to the American people, who were searching for information on the status of recovery efforts and the condition of telecommunication equipment where their loved ones could be found.

However, under the DIRS cooperative framework agreed to by communications companies and the Commission, DIRS is only in place *during* a natural disaster, and not in its aftermath. This means that once we move past the response mode, the Commission may no longer provide daily reports on network status. It is unclear what information the Commission will continue to provide on recovery efforts in Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands. This is unfortunate because DIRS provides the public with confidence in the progress of recovery efforts in that region. For example, post hurricanes Harvey and Irma, the FCC deactivated the DIRS before all communications infrastructure was restored. I believe that it is vital that the Commission keeps DIRS activated in Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands until telecommunications infrastructure is fully restored. It is imperative that the FCC does everything in its authority to continue to provide the American people with up to date infrastructure status and situational awareness information.

In addition, it is well documented that post Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Sandy, the Commission convened a series of field hearings to examine challenges to the nation's communications networks during natural disasters and in other times of crisis. These field hearings facilitated a wider national dialogue about the resiliency of communications networks and provided for an evaluation of lessons learned. It is my understanding that the FCC has not yet planned such hearings in response to Hurricane Irma or Maria. Even considering the necessity to enable FCC staff to have boots on the ground to increase situational awareness, it is essential that the Commission works to restore telecommunications infrastructure, while simultaneously conducting field hearings that would consider appropriate policies to improve natural disaster response, and inform the American people on appropriate next steps in recovery efforts.

While I commend the FCC's decision to grant a temporary waiver of certain Lifeline program requirements, and issuing a waiver to help facilitate the expansion of Public Safety interoperable communications, the Commission can and should do more to communicate its efforts to restore communications infrastructure in Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands. I urge the Commission to continue DIRS and encourage communications companies to provide the FCC with ongoing information on communication infrastructure status, including the condition of 911 service providers. I also request that the FCC provide a speedy time frame on when the Commission will hold field hearings in Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands to keep the American people informed and foster a sense of confidence in the storm recovery efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Bonnie Watson Coleman".

Bonnie Watson Coleman (NJ-12)
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

February 5, 2018

The Honorable Bonnie Watson Coleman
U.S. House of Representatives
1535 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman Coleman:

Thank you for your letter regarding the effects of Hurricanes Irma and Maria on Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Commission's efforts in response to these devastating storms. In addition to closely monitoring the storms and directing the Commission's response, I visited Puerto Rico, where I witnessed firsthand the catastrophic damage. The Commission staff, in partnership with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and operating under the National Disaster Recovery Framework, worked around the clock on response efforts, both in Washington, D.C. and on the ground in Puerto Rico.

Our immediate focus was on assisting with the restoration of communications services and networks in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, including by providing almost \$77 million in expedited Universal Service Fund support payments to assist restoration efforts. Moreover, as you know, the Commission uses the Disaster Information Reporting System (DIRS) to collect information from communications providers, and to share network status information with government agencies involved in the recovery effort, as well as to share aggregated information with the public. The Commission activated DIRS for Hurricane Maria on September 20, 2017. As part of the ongoing response effort, the Commission has kept DIRS activated for an unprecedented duration to ensure that the Commission and its partner agencies working on recovery, including the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and FEMA, have the latest and most accurate information regarding the status of telecommunications infrastructure. On November 17, 2017, in coordination with DHS's National Coordinating Center for Communications and FEMA, the Commission amended the schedule for communications providers to file reports concerning Hurricane Maria to DIRS. The Commission requested DIRS reports on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, rather than seven days per week, thus harmonizing its reporting schedule with those of the other agencies. The Commission also requested that communications providers supply information directly to agency personnel if any major changes to the status of communications occur on other days. In addition to publishing communications status reports three days per week, the FCC continues to be available to address emergency communications needs related to Hurricane Maria 24 hours per day, seven days per week.

As the most recent DIRS reports show, there has been substantial progress in getting communications services back up and working again. The Commission, in coordination with

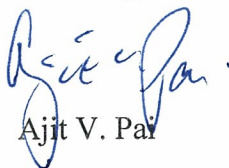
interagency partners, is evaluating on an ongoing basis how long to maintain DIRS activation for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Of course, the Commission will continue to remain in frequent contact with carriers about the status of network operations, regardless of any possible changes to the DIRS reporting since activation over four months ago

The Commission is also involved in the longer-term recovery effort. On October 6, I established a Hurricane Recovery Task Force to continue the Commission's work in support of the restoration of communications services in areas affected by this season's hurricanes, with an emphasis on addressing the challenges facing Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. This Task Force has been working hard and helping the Commission monitor the situation as companies repair and upgrade their networks in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

As before with other significant hurricanes, the Commission has also sought input and lessons learned from the hurricanes from the full range of stakeholders, including state and local officials, the 911 community, consumer groups, industry, our Federal response partners, and the public. Initial comments in response to our Public Notice were received on January 22, 2018, with reply comments due on February 21, 2018. The Commission will consider what additional steps, including public workshops or field hearings, might be taken to ensure that our nation's communications networks are prepared for future disasters.

I appreciate your interest in ensuring the restoration of communications services in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Your views are very important as we move forward with our recovery efforts and beyond. Please let me know if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ajit V. Pai".

Ajit V. Pai